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amenorrhœa

No. 9

Richard Anderson was 18 yr
Before the faculty

Richard Anderson – Md Carol.

admitted March 20th 1820–

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Amenorrhœa.

It is a painful condition of existence, that women are subject for the greater period of their lives, to a monthly sanguineous effusion from the Uterus. But though a painful, it is an essential one. Concerning the nature of this discharge, all that it will be necessary for me to say, is, that it is not, as has been supposed a simple pouring out of pure blood, but a fluid, sui generis, the result of a peculiar secretory action of the Uterus. In this country it usually commences about the fourteenth year, and its first appearance announces that the girl has arrived at the age of puberty and that the Uterus is qualified for its peculiar office. But as nature in all her operations, is liable to interruption, this action is sometimes considerably later in being established, and after it has been established, is liable to Suppression. The former of these states is called the Retention the latter the Suppression of the Menses, and this last is divided into Checked and Obstructed Menstruation. I propose to make a few remarks on each of these states. First of Retention. It is proper to remark that every slight delay in the appearing of the Menses is not to be considered as a case of Retention; for several circumstances, as peculiarity of temperament

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and constitution, may cause the action to be considerably later in being established, without occasioning any injury to the health. But when the action is longer than usual in being established, and there are at the same time evident marks of disease attending this state, it is to be considered and treated as a case of Retention. In the establishment of this new and important function, Nature requires the firm and steady cooperation of all the systems of the body; and any thing that occurs about this time, to destroy the harmony existing between them or to diminish their energies, will tend to prevent its establishment. Accordingly we find that the most usual cause of Retention is a want of vigour in the system, which most probably depends on a depraved condition of the digestive organs. All the symptoms usually to be met with in a case of Retention, tend to confirm our belief in this view of its pathology. It is commonly attended with that assemblage of symptoms, to which authors have given the appellation of Chlorosis, as great languor and disinclination to motion, pale or yellow complexion, indigestion, acidity and flatulence, loathing of food but craving for indigestible substances as chalk lime-plastering, cinders, sand

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ge and depraved condition of the body generally with edematous swellings of the lower extremities, pains of the head back and loins and costiveness always precedes and accompanies these symptoms. All these symptoms certainly arise out of a depraved condition of the digestive organs; but it is still a question whether they are primarily affected or whether they are brought to sympathise with other diseased parts. Cullen supposed that the organs of generation, particularly the Ovaries were primarily affected, that a certain state of the genital is necessary to give tone and vigour to the system, and that a defect of stimulus from these may give rise to the debility on which Retention and Chlorosis depend. It is I believe allowed that a healthy condition of the Ovaries is essential to Menstruation, for the discharge is supposed to indicate an aptitude for conception, which implies a healthy condition of the Ovaries. It is probable that Retention may in most cases arise more immediately from a diseased condition of the Ovaries, and which in some cases may no doubt be the original affection but which in most cases is symptomatic of a primary disease of the digestive organs, for as I have before said costiveness will almost

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always be found to have preceded every other symptom. Besides it is not probable that a deficiency of stimulus from the Ovaries would occasion the debility and all those symptoms I have enumerated, for it is well known that these organs have been extirpated without occasioning any injury to the health. That Retention is not the cause of Chlorosis is also proved by the fact, that the latter is not a disease peculiar to the female sex. I think we should come nearer the truth by considering Retention and Chlorosis as not connected to each other as cause and effect, but as concomitant effects arising from a common cause, which is a diseased condition of the digestive organs. In this view of the subject we are lead by the fact, that symptoms of a diseased state of the stomach and bowels are the first that are evident as well as by the consideration that a diseased state of these organs is sufficient to produce all the symptoms. After all the organs of the body have been fully expanded and established in the healthy discharge of their several functions, a healthy condition of the digestive organs is necessary to preserve them in this state; for in a diseased condition of these organs no function can be properly executed. By how much more then should we not expect a diseased condition of these organs

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to prevent altogether the establishment of a new function. And what a train of serious and alarming symptoms should we expect to arise in this delicate and critical state of the constitution. Whether I am right or not in considering the stomach and bowels as the primary seat of this disease, it certainly leads to the most efficacious mode of treating, for Retention can only be cured by restoring healthy actions to the digestive organs and through them to the system generally. It is worse than useless to attempt to bring on the discharge by such remedies as are supposed to act specifically on the Uterus without first improving the general health. Indeed I suspect they will hardly ever be a tolerable necessary, for the remedies suited to the latter indication will generally be found sufficient for the purpose. As costiveness generally precedes and accompanies all the other symptoms in this disease, I suspect it is principally concerned in the production of it, and this will account for Chlorosis appearing more frequently in the female sex than in the male as the former from several causes are more subject to costiveness than the latter. In our plan of cure our attention should be first directed to the removal of this symptom. The patient should be purged every day, or every other day, and

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the stimulating purges should be used, as the bowels are generally in a torpid state. As the system in Chlorosis is frequently in a very debilitated state, most persons are deterred from the use of cathartics by the idea of their increasing the debility. But they will have a contrary effect and the strength of the system will be found to increase with their use. They cause the evacuation of great quantities of offensive, irritating matter, which remaining in the intestines will tend more than any thing else to depress the system. This plan to be successful should be pursuingly pursued i.e. even for several months if the disease has been fully established. Although a course of purgatives aided by a generous diet, would probably in most cases be sufficient they may be assisted by tonic remedies. Of these the preparations of iron, as the tincture of muriated iron, carbonat of iron or which perhaps are the best [illegible] waters are to be preferred to all others. It is to be regretted that the natural preparations of iron are seldom procurable. In the interval time we other advantages to be derived from drinking these waters at their source. The change of scene, usually, to be met with at watering places [illegible] good, usually, by inducing compliance to the

mind which is generally in a peevish and melancholy state and the pursuing the water will oblige the patient to take a moderate exercise to which she is always averse, both of which will have considerable effect in invigorating tone and vigour to the digestive organs. The daily use of the salt-water bath both warm and cold has been recommended, and Chalybeate waters used in the same way will be advantageous. These internal tonic remedies and external means if judiciously employed may greatly expedite the cure. But should they be found to disagree with the patient, it will be prudent to abandon them and trust exclusively to purging and diet for the cure. The diet should be nourishing but of easy digestion, with a moderate portion of wine. This purgative plan of treating Chlorosis originated I believe with Dr. Thomson of Edinburgh, to whom the profession is indebted for many valuable improvements in the treatment of diseases. When by these means tone has been restored to the stomach and powers, and through them to the system generally the disease most probably will appear spontaneously, for nature unassisted in her operations will generally be competent to the cure. But if, from any cause, her efforts are too feeble, they

may be assisted by some of those remedies denominated Emmenagogues. But I will here remark that great caution is to be observed in their administration. The articles usually employed for this purpose are the hellebore, seneka, savin, ergot, guaiacum and cantharides, some of which are highly stimulating, and may do much harm unless particular attention be paid to the state of the system. For I will here repeat that Emmenagogues will be worse than nugatory, unless the Uterus has by the previous treatment, been brought to a proper state for menstruation: for these medicines are not given with a view of forcing the discharge, but of assisting the natural efforts of the system. Even when they are proper much judgment and nice discrimination are necessary in their use and the power of the medicine should be properly graduated to the state of the system. To cooperate with these remedies, some external means may be employed, such as topical bathing over the region of the Uterus, cloths wrung out of hot water applied to the external organs, sitting over the steam of hot water, blisters applied to the sacrum or to the upper anterior part of the thighs; and electricity passed repeatedly through

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the version of the uterus may be very beneficial. These applications will be made with the greatest prospect of advantage, when there is any thing like a tendency to menstruation. These means will generally be successful in bringing on the menses, but until the action is established firmly, the greatest attention is to be paid to the state of the bowels, and constipation which is always apt to occur, obviated by the appropriate means. Should Retention occur in a plethoric state of the system, as it sometimes does, with a hot skin and considerable febrile state, moderate bleedings may be useful and cathartics should be employed, not only for the purpose of evacuating the bowels, but with a view to their depleting effects and gentle exercise should be regularly taken. After these depleting remedies emmenagogues if necessary may be employed. I should have observed when speaking of Chlorosis, that it is sometimes accompanied with symptoms very much resembling Phthisis Pulmonalis as frequent pulse cough pain in the chest, nightsweats and emaciation. But these symptoms are generally occasioned by debility and may be distinguished from genuine Phthisis by the

pulse not being liable to regular exacerbations and by the cough being dry and seldom not preceded by tubercles and by a full inspiration giving no pain as in Phthisis. But although these symptoms may not occur in a phthisical habit, the case may terminate in consumption unless proper attention be paid to it. As they depend on irritation they commonly give way to some anodyne gentle emetics are recommended in these cases and in the scrofulous generally cathartics purgatives will also be proper. To relieve the pain a blister may be applied to some part of the chest and some expectorant as squill or ammonia or some other should be given to moderate the cough when it becomes troublesome, and rest should be procured at night by an opiate. Moderate exercise should be taken on horseback when the weather is fine. The diet should be nourishing but of easy digestion. Should the patient be really disposed to phthisis a removal to a warmer climate, will contribute much to prevent a termination in that disease. I now come to the question of the illness; but I have taken up so much time in speaking of Scrofulous that I must dismiss this head of the subject with a few remarks. By dyspepsia is meant the

interruption of the Menstrual discharge after it has been completely established. It may take place under two circumstances. The discharge may be suppressed during its flow, by causes acting suddenly and violently on the system, and this is called checked menstruation. This is frequently attended with some acute symptoms, as pain in the uterine region, fever, spasms of the stomach and intestines and hysterical affections, which are to be relieved by venesection, a cathartic, opiates and the foot bath. Although these symptoms may be readily removed, the injury received will frequently be so great, as to prevent the discharge from taking place at the next period and it will then partake of the nature of Obstructed Menstruation. Obstruction of the menses is occasioned by causes acting during the interval of the flow, which are various and may act either immediately on the uterus itself or on the system generally. It is most frequently the consequence of diseases that tend to weaken the powers of the system as dropsy, consumption &c. It may occur either in a plethoric or debilitated state of the system, and will require different

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treatment as it occurs in the one or the other. When it occurs in a plethoric state of the system it will require those remedies that tend to diminish action, as bleeding and purging and when these have been sufficiently employed, the emmenagogues may be resorted to. When it occurs in the opposite state, it is necessary first to restore the strength of the general system, by tonic remedies and all those means spoken of before under the head of Retention. When by these means the general health has been restored, if the menses do not appear emmenagogues may be employed, as well as all those topical applications before spoken of. When it occurs as the consequence of another disease, it can only be cured by removing the original affection. As mercury is a very powerful deobstruent it may be used with advantange in some obstinate cases of this disease. I am sensible that a great deal more might be said on this subject; but to say more would extend this paper to too great a length and I must conclude by hoping that it will not be examined too critically, as I am aware of its imperfections.